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EXPANDING SECURITY EASTWARD:  
NATO MILITARY ENGAGEMENT IN THE SOUTH  
CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

by

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***Abstract***

The South Caucasus and Central Asia are regions of growing strategic importance to European security due to their geographic location and vast untapped energy resources. NATO Secretary-General George Robertson recently visited the South Caucasus and Central Asian states underscoring NATO's resolve to expand security eastward under the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, the alliance's main framework for military cooperation. The expanded size and scope of PfP, NATO's chief engagement tool in Central Eurasia, clearly demonstrates NATO's commitment to regional security and the increased priority that has been assigned to the South Caucasus and Central Asia in NATO military planning.

## Chapter 1

# Expanding Security Eastward: NATO Military Engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia

*The Partnership for Peace programme, launched six years ago, is the main framework through which the Alliance promotes cooperation. In essence, it is a programme of bilateral military cooperation between the Alliance and individual non-NATO nations. Behind this initiative was the desire of the Allies to share their experience and expertise with the countries to NATO's East.*

—NATO Secretary-General George Robertson  
Tbilisi, Georgia  
26 September 2000

## INTRODUCTION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace (PfP) program was introduced in January 1994 and enables practical military cooperation between NATO, former Warsaw Pact members, militarily non-aligned countries and former Soviet states across Eurasia. The program consists of 19 NATO countries and 26 partner nations. PfP covers a wide range of defense-related activities, including air defense, communications, crisis management, democratic control of defense structures, defense planning and budgeting, interoperability with NATO forces, military training and exercises, peacekeeping, search and rescue and humanitarian operations.<sup>1</sup>

NATO's chief engagement tool in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, PfP has played a major role in expanding security and stability eastward from the Black Sea to

the Pamir mountains. Over the last few years, NATO has increased dramatically the size and scope of PfP activities in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Georgia, for example, will be hosting Cooperative Partner, the first large-scale peacekeeping exercise in the South Caucasus, in June 2001. The exercise will involve 4,000 troops and up to 40 ships and 15 aircraft from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States. Azerbaijan also will be hosting its first PfP exercise; a command post exercise called “Cooperative Determination,” this year. Additionally, both Azerbaijan and Georgia infantry troops operate with Turkey’s battalion in KFOR, the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo – a source of great pride and proof that PfP definitely increases interoperability with NATO forces. Armenia is currently developing a United Nations peacekeeping battalion with assistance from NATO member Greece that will form the basis for deeper involvement in PfP activities.<sup>2</sup> In Central Asia, NATO is engaged in hundreds of joint projects within the framework of the PfP program, including annual CENTRASBAT exercises. CENTRASBAT exercises are “in-the-spirit-of” PfP multinational peacekeeping exercises sponsored by the United States involving NATO countries and national peacekeeping battalions from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. PfP clearly underscores NATO’s commitment to regional security and the increased priority that has been assigned to the South Caucasus and Central Asia in NATO military planning.

The South Caucasus and Central Asia are included among NATO’s top priorities due to their geopolitical position (bordering China, Iran, Russia, Turkey and the Middle East) and vast untapped natural resources, specifically, Caspian energy reserves. The South Caucasus, in particular, is a natural land corridor for the transportation of oil from the

Caspian to the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. The proven reserves of oil and gas in the Caspian basin, approximately 100 billion barrels, could approach the size of Northern Europe, and therefore should be considered important.<sup>3</sup> The South Caucasus and Central Asia are also well-positioned to play a “strategic role” in redeveloping the Silk Road, the historic cross-continental trade route between Europe and Asia.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the geographic location and growing importance of Caspian energy resources have increased the strategic importance of the South Caucasus and Central Asia to European security.

All the South Caucasus and Central Asian states are members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), which provides an overarching structure for consultation and cooperation between NATO and EAPC nations on common security issues, and all but Tajikistan are members of PfP. PfP plays an important role in NATO enlargement for those countries wanting to join the alliance. Indeed, many defense analysts consider PfP a prerequisite for NATO accession. Although the program paves the way for NATO expansion, it also provides a suitable alternative for countries currently unwilling (militarily non-aligned countries such as Austria and Switzerland) or unable (former Soviet states such as the South Caucasus and Central Asian states) to join NATO. The former Soviet republics are seen as unable to join NATO for several reasons: They are weak militarily, NATO is reluctant to accept them, and Russia has strong objections.

PfP potentially can play an even greater role as a mechanism for calming crises and promoting regional security and cooperation. Rather than creating new dividing lines between east and west, NATO PfP is designed to establish a broad band of security in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, although there are different degrees and levels of



integration and cooperation. Unquestionably, NATO PfP has become a key component of the nascent European security architecture.

Conversely, Russia's security relationships with the South Caucasus and Central Asian states are aimed at redrawing the old lines of former Soviet control by reining these states back into a Russian "sphere of influence." Perpetuating the presence of Russian troops and military bases in Georgia is but one example in the South Caucasus. Russia's claims that it needs to create a buffer against Islamic fundamentalist movements, international terrorism and drug trafficking through Central Asia by reestablishing strategic partnerships with the Central Asian states constitute another illustration. Russia is also using the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Collective Security Treaty (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia) to create a security system that includes Russian-led joint regional forces, and thus establish broad support for its lasting regional military presence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Russia will probably continue to use the CIS to consolidate its hold on its southern periphery.

Despite Russia's increasing influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, NATO can contribute to regional security through its well-organized military engagement activities within the PfP framework. PfP can also provide important "tools" for partner countries in these regions to reform their militaries systematically, develop fitting defense capabilities, enhance interoperability with NATO forces, improve practical regional cooperation and respond effectively to regional security problems. As NATO Secretary-General George Robertson said:

The value of this inclusive framework is very clear. Every country in Europe has a structure through which they can enhance their security interests. No small, rigid regional alliances are necessary. No unilateral solutions are required. Through PfP and EAPC, security across Europe

has been structured towards inclusion and cooperation. That alone is, in my opinion, a massive change from the past, and a major contribution to the stability of the continent.<sup>5</sup>

This paper examines the role of NATO military engagement in shaping the security environment in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. It begins with an overview of the strategic importance and regional security dimensions of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. This is followed by a portrait of NATO's strategic objectives in both regions including the importance of maintaining access to Caspian energy resources. Russia's resurgence and military presence in what it terms its "near abroad," including the role of CIS peacekeeping forces is outlined in the next section. This paper then describes practical military cooperation between NATO and the South Caucasus and Central Asian states, particularly training and exercises, within PfP. Bilateral military assistance provided by NATO countries such as Greece, Italy, Turkey and the United States that often complement NATO PfP is also highlighted. This paper then summarizes the results of NATO PfP in the South Caucasus and Central Asia and identifies future trends in NATO military engagement in these two important sub-regions. Finally, the conclusion reviews the importance of NATO military engagement in enhancing regional security and stability in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> NATO Office of Information and Press, *NATO Handbook*, 1998, 86-97.

<sup>2</sup> Speech by Mr. Serge Sargsyan, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, at the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, 6 December 00.

<sup>3</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute *Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, 213-14.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Ariel Cohen, "US Interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus: the Challenges Ahead," *Central Asia and the Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies* (15 November 00).

<sup>5</sup> Speech by NATO Secretary-General George Robertson – Earl Grey Memorial Lecture, "NATO: What have you done for me lately," 16 February 01.

## Chapter 2

### **BACKGROUND: STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA**

*Whatever the size of the Caspian oilfields, the region is of strategic importance simply because of its location. Even someone who is deeply skeptical about the extent of the Caspian basin's potential wealth must acknowledge that it poses security issues of vital importance to all Eurasia and beyond.<sup>1</sup>*

The South Caucasus, comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, is strategically important due to its geographic position on NATO's southeastern flank, bordering regional powers Iran, Russia and Turkey, in addition to its proximity to the Middle East. Professor Uri Ra'anani, Director of Boston University's Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology & Policy, a think tank focusing on Russia and the former Soviet states, says that among post-Soviet regions the South Caucasus is second only to the Baltic states in strategic importance to NATO in part because its territory is contiguous with NATO ally Turkey and a "natural extension of Europe."<sup>2</sup> The South Caucasus also forms a "strategic corridor linking southern Europe with Central Asia" that could be used as a conduit for Caspian energy resources.<sup>3</sup> Continued instability in the Transcaucasus, however, could derail planned east-west energy corridors for transporting oil and natural gas to growing European markets. Still, for all its problems, the Caucasus region provides the most

direct route for transporting goods and natural resources from the Caspian basin and Central Asia to Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Like the South Caucasus, Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – is wedged between formidable regional powers: China, Iran and Russia. Additionally, Central Asia is well-positioned to serve as a classic “buffer zone” against non-traditional security threats such as international terrorism and drug trafficking coming from Afghanistan. Although Central Asia is geographically remote from NATO, Professor Ra’anan says the Partnership for Peace program still can be useful in Central Asia for enhancing self-confidence and improving working relationships with the North Atlantic alliance; however, there are no illusions about NATO membership. Currently, all the South Caucasus and Central Asian states, except Tajikistan, are members of NATO PfP.

NATO certainly recognizes the correlation between enhancing European security and maintaining regional stability in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. NATO Secretary-General George Robertson has stated that Europe cannot be fully secure if the South Caucasus and Central Asian states remain outside European security.<sup>5</sup> This perspective is also reflected in NATO speeches, ministerial communiqués and statements as well as the alliance’s new strategic concept highlighting the need for NATO to recognize the “more global context of security” and the increasing importance of conflict prevention, peacekeeping and crisis management in these two important sub-regions.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the South Caucasus and Central Asia are high on NATO’s strategic agenda.

The strategic importance of the South Caucasus and Central Asia is further underscored by the European Union’s (EU) Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia

(TRACECA) program. TRACECA, launched in 1993, is intended to develop a transport corridor along a “west-east axis” from Europe, across the Black Sea, South Caucasus and Caspian basin to Central Asia.<sup>7</sup>

Along with the geostrategic importance of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, Caspian resources will likely play a significant role in European energy security and the global energy market. The Caspian basin has increased in international importance dramatically due to the recent energy crunch, though estimates of the actual size of proven Caspian energy reserves vary greatly. Even at 30 billion barrels, or roughly three percent of the world’s proven oil reserves, the Caspian basin still represents an oil province corresponding in size to Norway (by comparison the Middle East holds nearly two-thirds, or about 600 billion barrels, of the world’s proven oil reserves).<sup>8</sup> While Caspian oil may provide only a small percentage of the total world production, new supplies could be used to increase the downward pressure on oil prices and as leverage against the monopoly held by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).<sup>9</sup> “The Caspian is no Persian Gulf, but its oil and gas potential at least equals the North Sea and therefore cannot be ignored,” writes leading Central Asia analyst S. Frederick Starr.<sup>10</sup> The region is also thought by energy analysts to be geographically well-positioned to respond to a growing European market. Caspian oil is earmarked for refineries in Europe and the Mediterranean including Turkey and Israel.<sup>11</sup>

According to a policy brief from the Caspian Studies Program at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, the flow of Caspian energy resources to European markets through more stable Western-oriented countries can

reduce vulnerabilities stemming from restricted output or disruption resulting from a conflict in oil-producing regions such as the turbulent Middle East:

Considering the assessments of modest quantities of Caspian oil, why has this region received such high-level attention from Western governments? The answer to this question lies in the field of energy security: additional supplies, even at modest levels of output, can make an important contribution to limiting the market power of the major producers as well as reducing to some extent the percentage of world oil production subject to disruption. Therefore, this marginal oil can bring about a lowering of prices and can enhance energy security.<sup>12</sup>

Caspian oil exploration, production and distribution could erode the political leverage exercised by the OPEC states as well as lessen the percentage of world oil production subject to disruption. Certainly, enhancing European energy security depends on securing access to resources outside the Middle East, such as the Caspian region, and establishing an east-west energy transport corridor that bypasses Iran and Russia.

The transportation of Caspian energy resources to international oil markets has far-reaching regional security implications. Consequently, the argument over determining energy transport routes has emerged as the thorniest and most important issue confronting the five Caspian states – Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iran. Prior to 1998, Caspian oil and gas pipelines ran primarily through Russia, which still regards the Caspian as belonging to its sphere of influence. On 26 March 2001, Kazakhstan and Russia opened a 1,580-km pipeline transporting oil from the northern Caspian basin to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiisk, the first of its kind in the region. While Russia has sought to preserve its monopoly, other Caspian states have approached Western oil companies about alternative energy transport corridors to relieve their excessive dependence on Russia.

The options being considered by Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to bypass Russia include: a western route through Georgia to the Black Sea; a southwestern route from Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Mediterranean coast of Turkey; southern routes through Iran, or Afghanistan and Pakistan; and eastern routes from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to China. For the exporting countries, the Iranian route appears economically (but not politically) attractive due to its geographic proximity to the Caspian region and existing energy infrastructure; the extensive pipeline network across Iran's territory and oil terminals in the Persian Gulf might render the cost of transporting energy resources across Iran comparatively low. Some energy analysts and international oil companies also appear to favor the southern route through Iran as the most economically feasible way to tap northern Caspian energy resources.<sup>13</sup>

Iran seeks to capitalize on the revenues that will result from the exploitation of Caspian energy products and to expand its influence in the region. An Iranian pipeline would link the Caspian basin to the Persian Gulf and place Iran in a strategic position to serve as a conduit for energy exports.<sup>14</sup> Obviously, it could use this position to advance its ideological goals and to deprive perceived adversaries of both Caspian and Iranian oil.

In December 2000, Kazakhstan held discussions with France's TotalFinaElf, British Gas and Italy's Agip to study the feasibility of building a Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran oil pipeline to transport energy resources from one Kazakh oil field from the Caspian basin through Iran to the Asia-Pacific region. If the project proves viable, the proposed southern export route could deal a significant blow to the US-sponsored plan for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

Due to the risks of an Iranian stranglehold, the US opposes the Iranian pipeline and increased energy dependence on the Gulf states, instead it lobbies heavily for a route from Azerbaijan's capital to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. The US is relying on Kazakhstan's potential participation (based on the Kashagan oil field) in the proposed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan line to ensure the profitability of the east-west transit corridor. Washington has been asking Kazakhstan to commit enough oil to the pipeline to ensure its economic viability if sufficient volumes of oil are not found in Azerbaijan.<sup>15</sup> According to the US proposal, 80 percent of the pipeline's capacity of 1 million barrels per day would be used for the export of oil from Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian and the remaining 20 percent would be reserved for Kazakh oil.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, US diplomats have stressed that, if Kazakhstan selected the southern route through Iran, it would be vulnerable to any disruption to the smooth passage of oil tankers through the Straits of Hormuz, a strategic "choke point" in the Gulf.<sup>17</sup> This should be an important impediment for any country wishing to choose the Iranian option.

On 1 March 2001, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and the United States signed a memorandum of understanding in Kazakhstan's capital Astana on the planned 1,730-km pipeline. The memorandum of understanding represents a watershed by providing the framework for Kazakhstan to join the project and export Kazakh oil to world markets via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route.<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Jones, America's envoy to the Caspian and former ambassador to Kazakhstan, reported that Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev fully supports the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and has guaranteed that the first Kazakh oil from the offshore Kashagan field on the Caspian shelf will be transported via that route.<sup>19</sup> Kashagan, a recent discovery that could make Kazakhstan



one of the world's leading oil producers, could hold 50 billion barrels of oil, making it the second largest oil field after Saudi Arabia's Ghawar oil field, which contains 70 billion barrels of oil.<sup>20</sup> Kashagan and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline are due to start operations in 2004-2005.<sup>21</sup> Azerbaijan and Georgia's geostrategic importance will increase even further if this takes place.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline would also bolster Turkey's economy, enhance Europe's energy security and help to cement NATO's growing strategic partnership with the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Indeed, the shifting geopolitics and growing importance of Caspian energy resources has increased the strategic importance of the South Caucasus and Central Asia to NATO and European security.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> S. Frederick Starr, Central Asia's Security Needs and Emerging Structures for Addressing Them, *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 30 March 01.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Professor Uri Ra'anana, March 01.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Lindh, "Resolving a frozen conflict: Neither Russia nor the west should try to impose a settlement the southern Caucasus," *Financial Times*, 20 February 01.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Speech by NATO Secretary-General George Robertson, "Caucasus Today: Perspectives of Regional Cooperation and Partnership with NATO," Tbilisi, Georgia, 26 September 2000.

<sup>6</sup> NATO Office of Information and Press, *NATO Handbook*, 1998, 86-97.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission External Relations Directorate General: Europe and the Newly Independent States, Common Foreign and Security Policy, External Service Transcaucasus and Central Asia (including Mongolia) Website; [www.traceca.org](http://www.traceca.org)

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Manning, "The Myth of the Caspian Great Game and the New Persian Gulf," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Summer/Fall 2000, Vol. VII, Issue 2.

<sup>9</sup> Lucian Pugliese, "Energy Security: How Valuable is Caspian Oil?," Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, Caspian Studies Program Policy Brief, No. 3, January 2001, 1-3.

<sup>10</sup> S. Frederick Starr, "Central Asian Security: Not a Solo Project," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 15 November 00.

<sup>11</sup> Julia Nanay, "Assessing Global Demand and Future Export Markets for Caspian Oil and Gas," Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, *Caspian*

## Notes

*Studies Program Experts Conference Report* “Succession and Long-Term Stability in the Caspian Region 1999,” October 1999, 83.

<sup>12</sup> Lucian Pugliaresi, *op.cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 26 June 00.

<sup>15</sup> *Financial Times*, 11 December 00.

<sup>16</sup> Interfax, 1311 GMT, 13 December 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-1213, via World News Connection.

<sup>17</sup> *Financial Times*, 11 Dec 00.

<sup>18</sup> *Anatolia*, 1344 GMT, 1 March 01; FBIS-WEU-2001-0301, via World News Connection.

<sup>19</sup> Interfax, 2 March 01; via lexis-nexis.

<sup>20</sup> *Caspian Crossroads*, Summer/Fall 2000.

<sup>21</sup> AFX News, 2 March 01; via lexis-nexis.

## Chapter 3

### REGIONAL SECURITY ISSUES

An “arc of instability” extends from the Caucasus to Central Asia. The South Caucasus and Central Asian states have been beleaguered by security problems including ethnic conflicts, humanitarian crises, and regional disintegration.<sup>1</sup> The South Caucasus, in particular, has been besieged by conflicts that seriously threaten to undermine Eurasian security.

The Caucasus rivals the Balkans for the status of Europe’s most conflict-ridden region. Due to the number and intensity of clashes, the potential for spillover, and its strategic location – between Europe and Central Asia, in close proximity to the Middle East – the Caucasus poses vexing problems for the architects of European security.<sup>2</sup>

Since gaining independence in 1991, Georgia has been troubled by several regional disputes. Two regions, Abkhazia, located on the Black Sea, and South Ossetia, on the Russian border, tried to secede from Georgia in the early 1990s. Russia has been implicated in supporting secessionist movements in both autonomous regions. Russian support for Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists, who succeeded in achieving *de facto* independence, was presumably in retaliation for Georgia’s refusal to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>3</sup> Georgia finally joined the CIS in 1993, after the West repeatedly ignored the pleas of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze for assistance.

In 1994, Russian “peacekeeping” forces (supposedly representing the CIS) deployed to Abkhazia following a Georgia-Abkhazia cease-fire agreement. In addition, Russian “peacekeeping” troops have been in South Ossetia since 1992. Although cease-fires remain in effect in both regions, the situation remains very tense since no comprehensive solution is in sight.<sup>4</sup>

Russian military presence in Georgia remains a serious problem for regional stability. NATO, in fact, has been seeking the withdrawal of Russian military equipment from Georgia in compliance with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. Signed in 1990, the CFE treaty established ceilings on conventional weaponry and reduced the overall size and forward deployment of then-Soviet armed forces.<sup>5</sup> As of December 2000, Russia is in compliance with the CFE treaty.

NATO has said that the dismantling of Russian military bases in Georgia would be a “positive step” which Russia must take in order to comply with an agreement reached at the November 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit concerning its military presence in Georgia. Russian compliance, however, is not guaranteed: the four bases on Georgian territory - Akhalkalaki (on the southern border with Turkey), Batumi (on the Black Sea coast), Gudauta (Abkhazia), and Vaziani (near the capital, Tbilisi) - were recently described by Moscow as “all that Russia has left of the once formidable Transcaucasus Military District.”<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, Russian peacekeeping forces stationed in Abkhazia continue to strain relations. According to the Georgian deputy defense minister, General Guram Nikolaishvili, having “Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia is just like having them in Georgia.”<sup>7</sup> Dismantling Russian bases and withdrawing Russian “peacekeepers” have

been among the thorniest issues between Russia and Georgia and are long-standing goals of Georgian foreign policy.

Russia's military campaigns in Chechnya constitute another source of instability in the South Caucasus. Security issues that have arisen from the conflict include: (1) Russian pressure to patrol on Georgian territory, (2) Moscow's constant allegations that Georgia and Azerbaijan are serving as a bases of operations and support for Chechen rebels, and (3) heightened alarm regarding Russia's role in Georgia's breakaway regions, further complicating Georgian-Russian relations.<sup>8</sup> Moscow's accusations remain an expression of continued hostility toward Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Kremlin has tried to force Tbilisi into transferring control of the 70-km Chechnya-Georgia border to Russian border guards and may also try to pressure Baku into accepting Russian military bases on Azerbaijan's territory.<sup>9</sup> NATO and the West have expressed grave concern about human rights abuses and the potential spillover of the conflict in the Caucasus.<sup>10</sup> Seasoned reporter Igor Rotar predicts that the Chechen war will "aggravate existing conflicts and ignite new hot spots throughout the region."<sup>11</sup>

Nagorno-Karabakh is another flash point endangering regional stability. Azerbaijan and Armenia fought a three-year war over the (ethnically Armenian) Azeri province of Nagorno-Karabakh after it proclaimed independence from Azerbaijan in 1991. Armenia received a billion dollars worth of Russian arms. Nearly seven years after the cease-fire between Armenia and Azerbaijan, prospects for resolving the conflict over the disputed territory have improved slightly with the OSCE Minsk Group mediating the Karabakh conflict resolution talks.<sup>12</sup> Renewed fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, however, would certainly undermine regional stability.<sup>13</sup>

A wide range of South Caucasus security issues, including the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, has been discussed regularly in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which provides the overall framework for cooperation between NATO and partner nations. The EAPC established an open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on the Caucasus to intensify efforts to use the Council as a vehicle for conflict prevention and crisis management. This sub-regional group could form the basis for a new security architecture in the region and help to develop a regional stability pact in coordination with the European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations.<sup>14</sup>

According to Georgia's first deputy foreign minister, Mr. Giorgi Burduli, if the concept for "the Stability Pact in the Caucasus bears fruit, the role of the EAPC, along with other international organizations, would be substantial in terms of consultation and practical cooperation."<sup>15</sup> He stated further that "regional cooperation in the Caucasus is still weak," and that the EAPC should encourage the South Caucasus states to continue using the ad hoc working group to resolve regional issues such as facilitating negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan to address the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Having an agreement such as the US-Baltic Charter or the EU's Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe "would go a long way towards diffusing regional conflicts and anchor these vulnerable states firmly with more powerful countries and international bodies," he said.<sup>16</sup> Unquestionably, a regional security system underpinned by NATO and the EU would greatly enhance regional stability. According to the NATO secretary-general,

We continue to place a high priority on the strengthening of our partnership with all members of the Euro-Atlantic community through the EAPC and the Partnership for Peace. We believe that Partnership is pivotal to the role of the Alliance in promoting security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region and contributes to the enhancement of the Alliance's capabilities in crisis management. We therefore welcome discussions

under way in the EAPC on its possible role in conflict prevention and crisis management, and in developments to promote regional cooperation in South-East Europe as well as in the Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>17</sup>

According to the International Crisis Group, a European-based multinational organization for conflict prevention, “risks of internal crisis and cross-border violence run high in the region of Central Asia.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the Central Asian presidents met in Kazakhstan’s business capital, Almaty, on 5 January 2001, to discuss regional security issues, particularly the potential spillover of the war in Afghanistan and Taliban-supported Islamic incursions. The Central Asian summit, chaired by Tajikistan, included Presidents Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan, Askar Akaev of Kyrgyzstan, Imomali Rakhmanov of Tajikistan and Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, as well as Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov (former head of the Foreign Intelligence Service). Turkmenistan, which has established a dialogue with Afghanistan’s ruling Taliban regime, did not send any representatives.<sup>19</sup> Stating, “stability in one state today means stability in all other members in the community,” Uzbekistan President Karimov called on the Central Asian states to make a concerted effort to defend themselves against regional threats, especially Afghanistan-based Islamic insurgencies.<sup>20</sup>

Kyrgyzstan has continued to warn that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is preparing for a repeat summer offensive from bases in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.<sup>21</sup> At a national security council meeting in March, Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akaev said rebel incursions could begin as early as March-April and are likely to be even more extensive than before.<sup>22</sup> The IMU raided Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and staged several incursions into a remote mountainous region bordering southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan from bases in Afghanistan and Tajikistan in August 2000.<sup>23</sup>

The IMU has been accused of trying to carve out an Islamic state in Central Asia's Fergana Valley. The valley is a "melting pot" of ethnic groups at the heart of Central Asia, which has recently experienced a resurgence of Islamic religious fervor. The multi-ethnic nature of Fergana is rooted in the Soviet period, during which the valley was divided among the three Soviet republics of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.<sup>24</sup> After the dismantling of the Soviet Union, many experts believed that "wars would break out in Fergana, as they did in the Balkans and the Caucasus."<sup>25</sup>

Another round of IMU attacks coupled with other non-traditional security threats such as drug trafficking, could further destabilize the region; Central Asia is located along major drug trafficking routes from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe. Such non-traditional security threats have gained the attention of Western officials. In testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George J. Tenet, stated,

The drug threat is increasingly intertwined with other threats. For example, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which allows Bin Ladin and other terrorists to operate on its territory, encourages and profits from the drug trade. Some Islamic extremists view drug trafficking as a weapon against the West and a source of revenue to fund their operations... We are becoming increasingly concerned about the activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, an extremist insurgent and terrorist group whose annual incursions into Uzbekistan have become bloodier and more significant every year.<sup>26</sup>

Non-traditional security threats along with porous and unstable borders and domestic conflict along regional and ethnic lines have undermined the Central Asian states, particularly Tajikistan, which shares a 1,500-kilometer border with Afghanistan. Illegal weapons and narcotics have continued to flow across the Tajik-Afghan border, and the narcotics trade has spread from Tajikistan throughout much of Central Asia.<sup>27</sup>



Dr. Jeffrey Starr, a high-ranking US Department of Defense official, visited Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe on 17 January, underscoring the growing strategic importance of Central Asia to US and Western security interests. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan could serve as a buffer against the problems coming out of Afghanistan. The US State Department, in fact, sponsors the Central Asian Border Security initiative, which provides assistance to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan for improving border security. Uzbekistan received US communications equipment recently under the initiative to fight terrorism, drug trafficking and illegal arms smuggling.<sup>28</sup> In December 2000, Kyrgyzstan received \$1 million in military equipment, including tactical radio communications, to fortify border security. Indeed, Dr. Starr's visit highlighted the need for Tajikistan, which defense analysts have long considered the weakest link in Central Asian security, to play a more active role in regional anti-insurgency efforts. The trip could open the door for groundbreaking US-Tajikistan military cooperation in areas such as border security and non-proliferation of biological and chemical weapons. It could also allow for an expanded role for NATO in assisting Tajikistan in similar ways, most probably within the framework of PfP. Integrating Tajikistan into a cohesive regional security framework and improving border security could make it harder for Islamic terrorists to use Tajikistan as a transit route for attacks into neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Although Islamic insurgents such as the IMU endanger security in Central Asia, Dr. John Schoeberlein, director of the International Crisis Group's Central Asia Project, cautions that regional governments, particularly Uzbekistan, are using the rising threat of terrorism to increase repression of political opposition and tighten control over their societies. Western governments have been slow to criticize Uzbekistan's increased

repression, most probably because of the IMU's link to international terrorism (the Clinton administration had added the IMU to its list of terrorist organizations). Dr. Schoeberlein recommends that Western efforts to assist Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan should emphasize human rights and democratization rather than increasing regional militarization in order to improve regional security.<sup>29</sup> The International Crisis Group paper, "Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security," suggests that a variety of factors, particularly the "increased militancy" of Islamic groups will continue to erode the national security of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.<sup>30</sup>

As outlined in its new foreign policy concept, Russia views the South Caucasus and Central Asia as part of its "near abroad," and exerts its considerable leverage to influence the foreign policies and defense alignments of the former Soviet states.<sup>31</sup> For example, Russia recently used energy as a lever against Georgia to dissuade the small Caucasus country from aligning itself more closely with the West. Yielding to Russian pressure, Georgia's President Eduard Shevardnadze recently softened his position on applying for NATO membership discussing instead the possibility of declaring neutrality by 2005.<sup>32</sup> Russia has also warned Georgia about its territory being used as a logistics base for the breakaway Chechen republic. The possibility that Georgia is being used as a transit country for Chechen fighters and weapons is remote since Chechens assisted Abkhaz secessionists in their fight for independence against Georgia. Georgia, however, recently announced its internal troops would be increasing patrols in the Pankisi gorge near the border with Chechnya to block possible infiltration routes of Chechen guerrillas into neighboring parts of Russia.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Russia has expressed alarm at alleged

NATO and US encroachment on former Soviet territory, particularly the oil-rich Caspian basin.

Russia's military presence is a key component of its security strategy in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>34</sup> Russia still maintains bases and "peacekeeping" troops in Georgia and Tajikistan in addition to a formal security pact with Armenia.<sup>35</sup> In the case of Tajikistan these troops consist primarily of Russia's 201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Infantry Division.<sup>36</sup> Russia also holds regular joint exercises (e.g., Tajikistan hosted the CIS Southern Shield 2000 exercises, involving 10,000 troops from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in April 2000) as well as supplying arms and military equipment to those South Caucasus and Central Asian states that are amenable to Russian hegemony.

Along with bilateral security arrangements, Russia has been seeking to establish a "collective" security system, particularly on its southern rim.<sup>37</sup> On 11 October 2001, Russia and its five partners in the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) – Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – signed an agreement in Kyrgyzstan for creating regional forces and a collective security system. This latest effort by Russia actually increases regional polarization in the South Caucasus by further dividing Armenia, which has extensive security ties to Russia, from its non-CST neighbors Georgia and Azerbaijan, and has broad security implications for the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The CST member states also adopted a joint statement on Central Asian security, highlighting their concern over security on the CIS's southern borders.

The defense agreement is intended to improve politico-military integration and provide operational military capability in the form of regional forces. The security

accord “On Creating Forces and Means of the Collective Security System” establishes “the basis for introducing and stationing collective troops on the signatory countries’ territories. Under the agreement, each of the six member countries is to earmark national military units for use as part of CST forces.”<sup>38</sup> A message had already gone out to the general staffs to “draft proposals on forming regional forces” in support of the collective security system.<sup>39</sup> The allocated units will participate in exercises and, if necessary, military operations on the territories of CST states under a joint command. This potentially could serve as a pretext for sending mainly Russian troops into troubled areas and Central Asian hot spots. The CIS Collective Security Council, consisting of the heads of state, will decide collectively when and where to deploy troops, as well as the purpose and length of their deployment, along with the consent of the host country. According to the agreement, the “tasks of a multinational military force would include jointly repelling foreign military aggression and carrying out joint counter-terrorism operations.”<sup>40</sup>

The security pact outlines a three-tiered collective security system consisting of a western sector (Russia and Belarus), a South Caucasus sector (Russia and Armenia) and a Central Asian sector (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). Russia’s inclusion in all three tiers demonstrates Moscow’s strategic intent to maintain spheres of influence in the CIS, and further cement its role as a permanent fixture dominating the CST states.

Armenia is Russia’s traditional ally in the South Caucasus. Russia provides security guarantees to Armenia by treaty, and has supplied a billion dollars worth of Russian arms.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, approximately 3,100 Russian troops are deployed in Armenia. Russia also maintains one military base, one MiG-29 squadron and one SA-10 (S-300) air

defense battery on Armenian territory.<sup>42</sup> Yet Armenia for a decade has been in a de facto state of war with neighboring Azerbaijan, a major portion of whose territory Armenia occupies.

In Central Asia, Russia's goals, including the creation of a rapid reaction force, also are ambitious. Based on the security pact, a joint rapid reaction force consisting of four battalions from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan would be used to respond to regional crises across Central Asia and to fortify porous border areas against "terrorist" attacks. Russia and the Central Asian states have identified terrorism as a common threat to regional stability. The joint rapid reaction force would be a "small, compact group, consisting of four battalions contributed by the partner states," according to CIS Collective Security Council Secretary Valery Nikolaenko.<sup>43</sup> On Russia's southern flank, however, the nascent rapid reaction force shows two large gaps due to the absence of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Neither of those two countries accepts a return of Russian hegemony, and both seek "countervailing factors" outside the CIS.<sup>44</sup>

Additionally, Nikolaenko expressed concern about a possible repeat of last year's IMU border incursions and reiterated that the "Tajik-Afghan border is the main defense line for the territorial integrity and security of the entire Central Asian region."<sup>45</sup> With 10,000 Russian border guards and a motorized division permanently stationed on its territory, Tajikistan depends almost entirely on Russia for border security. Russia recently "hardened" its defensive positions along the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan in response to IMU incursions into three Central Asian republics and the Taliban offensive in northern Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> By establishing a broad coalition, Russia attempts to legitimize its own intervention in Central Asia, especially on the Tajik-

Afghan border.<sup>47</sup> The CIS security chief added that the rapid reaction force construct would be adopted at the CIS Collective Security Council meeting in Armenia's capital, Yerevan, in May 2001.<sup>48</sup>

Russia continues to wield considerable military influence in Central Asia although the tendency of that influence is changing from bilateral agreements to multilateral endeavors. Russian efforts to create a rapid reaction force in Central Asia constitute the first concrete step Moscow has taken to establish regional forces within the framework of the CIS Collective Security Treaty. According to the president of Kyrgyzstan, "Russia, as a great power, could become the main force in the formation of a system of stability and security in Central Asia."<sup>49</sup> A Russian-led rapid reaction force in Central Asia will enable Russia to preserve its lasting military presence on the CIS's southern borders. Indeed, by agreeing to subordinate national military forces to Russian command, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are surrendering a certain degree of independence, so that they more closely resemble Russian satellites than sovereign states.

### Notes

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<sup>5</sup> *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> *Kommersant*; via *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 1 August 00.

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<sup>9</sup> Igor Rotar, "Chechen Spark-Caucasian Powder Keg," *Perspective*, Vol. X, No. 2, November-December 1999.

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- <sup>22</sup> *The Hindu*, 11 March 01; via lexis-nexis.
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## Chapter 4

### **NATO MILITARY ENGAGEMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA**

*The Caucasus has emerged as a pivotal geostrategic region within which the interests of the US, Europe, Russia, Iran, Turkey and the broader Islamic world intersect. The region will be crucial to the economic development of the ancient Silk Road – the cross continental trade route between the East and Central Asia, and Europe and the Middle East. Oil and gas reserves...are estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars. Major oil and gas pipelines are planned to bring the abundant energy resources of the Caspian Sea and Kazakhstan to global markets.<sup>1</sup>*

NATO is very interested in fostering regional security and stability in the South Caucasus and Central Asia in order to enhance European security. Many defense analysts suggest that NATO objectives include: fostering regional security and stability through peacetime military engagement; ensuring access to Caspian basin energy resources; combating non-traditional security threats such as international terrorism, drug trafficking, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and containing Russia's resurgence in the region (at the expense of the sovereignty and territorial integrity particularly of Georgia and Azerbaijan). NATO is also alarmed by the increased militarization of the CIS's southern borders.<sup>2</sup> Further, the West is concerned by the rapidly developing security relationship between Russia and Iran. Iran is already Russia's third largest customer for weapons and military training, after China and India.<sup>3</sup> Russian-Iranian rapprochement is

clearly intended to block Western influence in the region and derail east-west energy corridors from the Caspian region to Europe.

NATO's rapidly growing interest in the South Caucasus and Central Asia is illustrated by NATO Secretary-General George Robertson's visits to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan in January 2001, Georgia in September, and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in July 2000. Outlining the general approach guiding NATO engagement, Lord Robertson emphasized that European security is "inseparably linked to that of other countries." On 26 September 2000, Robertson told a conference in Tbilisi on Regional Cooperation and Partnership with NATO that "the more secure our neighbors are the more secure we are... European security first of all depends on how well our neighbors are protected."<sup>4</sup> Robertson's visit to Georgia underscored NATO's resolve to extend security links under the Partnership for Peace program. US Air Force General Joseph Ralston, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, visited Tbilisi on 5 April 2001, demonstrating continued NATO commitment to Georgia (a key ally bordering NATO member Turkey) and the increased priority the South Caucasus and Central Asia now have in NATO military planning.<sup>5</sup>

Fostering security cooperation with the South Caucasus and Central Asian states is high on NATO's security agenda. NATO recently established a regional group in Central Asia similar to one set up in the Caucasus for monitoring events in the region and to provide technical assistance to Central Asian states for natural disasters and other emergencies.<sup>6</sup> During a visit to Kyrgyzstan in July 2000, Robertson explained:

NATO may be far away from Central Asia geographically, but we share many of the same problems and we clearly benefit from closer co-operation. Indeed, Central Asia is an important region for Europe, and there is great social and economic potential to be realized. In fact, I would

say that Europe cannot be fully secure or realize its own full potential, if the Central Asian countries are left outside the equation.

PfP constitutes NATO's chief engagement tool in the former Soviet republics and the cornerstone for deepening NATO military engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. This initiative reflects the alliance's desire to share its military expertise and experience with other countries and the perception that it is in NATO's strategic interest to promote the democratic transformation of these countries and assist in developing their militaries along Western lines. NATO members, such as Turkey and the US, provide military assistance to partner countries on a bilateral basis in a way that often complements PfP. After joining PfP, each partner nation in consultation with NATO develops an Individual Partnership Plan (IPP), which covers a two-year period. The IPP reflects the partner country's specific interoperability objectives and forms the basis for expanded cooperation with the alliance.

The size and scope of PfP activities in the South Caucasus and Central Asia have increased significantly over the last few years. Azerbaijan and Georgia joined PfP at the program's inception in 1994 and have become two of its most active constituents, using PfP as a tool to bring their armed forces closer to NATO standards. A Georgian infantry platoon currently operates with a Turkish battalion as part of the NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo, also known as KFOR. In so doing, Georgia has fostered a "degree of technical and conceptual interoperability among (NATO and non-NATO) forces that is unprecedented."<sup>7</sup> Azerbaijan also has an infantry platoon operating with Turkey's peacekeeping battalion. Georgia's role in KFOR is a source of great national pride and demonstrates the country's ability to work smoothly with NATO peacekeeping forces. During the platoon's rotation in September 2000, Georgia's defense minister, Lieutenant

General David Tevzadze, explained that each successive Georgian platoon “goes to Kosovo as raw recruits and returns as well-trained soldiers.”<sup>8</sup>

Azerbaijan and Georgia’s 2000-2001 Individual Partnership Plans focus on a range of activities from peacekeeping and disaster planning to English-language training and military exercises. Georgia will host several activities and joint exercises in 2001, including its first multilateral PfP exercise, Cooperative Partner, a maritime and amphibious field training exercise, from 11-23 June 2001. The peacekeeping exercise is designed to increase stability in the Black Sea region and build confidence among the littoral states, including Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine, through practical military cooperation in areas such as conducting embargo operations. Troops from five NATO countries – France, Germany, Italy, Turkey and the US – in addition to forces from six partner nations – Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Sweden and Ukraine – are expected to participate in the exercise. Forces include approximately 4,000 military personnel, 40 warships, two submarines, 12 fighter and 2 military transport aircraft. NATO will also commit portions of the Standing Naval Force Mediterranean, composed of destroyers and frigates from several NATO countries. Amphibious forces from several countries, including 100 Georgian marines from the battalion in Poti, will practice amphibious techniques in support of peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations. Unfortunately, the original location was recently changed from Batumi in Adjara to Poti in Georgia proper due to objections raised by Aslan Abashidze, the leader of the Adjarian autonomous region, who has adopted a secessionist posture with Russian encouragement, and opposes the NATO exercise because he supposedly fears a military coup.<sup>9</sup> The port of Poti has limited infrastructure and can handle only a relatively small number of naval

vessels. This could cause logistics problems for the large-scale exercise, according to NATO military planners. This latest development highlights the need for continued NATO military engagement particularly in the South Caucasus.

Azerbaijan also will host its first PfP exercise, Cooperative Determination, a peacekeeping staff exercise, from 5-16 November 2001. The exercise is designed to practice operating a multinational brigade headquarters according to established NATO command and control procedures to include coordinating airlift, medical evacuation and search and rescue operations for a peace support operation. Among the major themes are learning how to work better with relief organizations, improving the coordination of aerial delivery of humanitarian relief supplies and better utilizing valuable aviation assets such as transport helicopters. Nine NATO countries (France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the US) and 10 partner nations (Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, FYROM, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland and Azerbaijan) will take part in the computer-aided simulation. Azerbaijan also conducts regional courses in civil military cooperation at its military academy in Baku. Military personnel from all the South Caucasus states attend NATO courses and seminars in crisis management and peacekeeping in addition to various other exchange programs.

Azerbaijan and Georgia are currently undergoing force restructuring and reorganization with technical assistance from NATO and individual member countries such as Turkey and the US. Turkey recently modernized the Marneuli air base in southern Georgia for \$1.5 million. US military cooperation in Georgia, according to a Pentagon spokesman, is designed to help the armed forces develop military capabilities necessary to preserve the mountainous Caucasus state's territorial integrity and become

more self-sufficient in defense matters such as border security and military reorganization. US European Command (USEUCOM) recently conducted a defense assessment of Georgia's military and made several recommendations for restructuring the armed forces, including the creation of a rapid reaction force consisting of one to three light brigades to provide more flexibility in handling regional crises. The 11<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry Brigade has been designated as the core unit for crisis response including natural disasters and civil emergencies, and is among the formations spearheading the transformation of Georgian land forces. According to a USEUCOM spokesman, future US military cooperation will be based on achieving this and other recommendations contained in the report.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, US Green Berets recently conducted training in Tbilisi for Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian mine sweepers. This humanitarian effort was intended to help the three Caucasus states improve their ability to deal with countless land mines remaining from Armenia-Azerbaijan and Abkhazia-Georgia disputes. The US-sponsored training activity brought together soldiers from Armenia and Azerbaijan for the first time since they fought over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory.<sup>11</sup>

Armenia recently has been considering upgrading its biennial Individual Partnership Plan and increasing cooperation with NATO within the framework of Partnership for Peace. Admiral Guido Venturoni, chairman of NATO's Military Committee, visited Armenia from 8-9 March to discuss alliance efforts to expand military cooperation with Yerevan, and met with Armenia's President Robert Kocharian, Prime Minister Andranik Margarian, Defense Minister Serge Sarkisian and Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Mikael Harutiunian. Armenia also expressed interest in obtaining

NATO assistance to form a UN peacekeeping battalion, which theoretically could operate under UN mandate anywhere in the world.

The visit produced an informal agreement on creating an Armenian peacekeeping unit with NATO assistance in the framework of the Partnership for Peace program. Yerevan envisages a battalion-size unit--an ambitious goal in light of the experience of other PfP countries, which began with platoon- or company-size peacekeeping units before a few of them progressed to battalions. The Armenian side showed interest also in officer training in the West, English-language training for military personnel, and other prospects that PfP can offer.<sup>12</sup>

Along with peacekeeping, Armenia seeks to learn how to cope better with natural disasters, particularly earthquakes.<sup>13</sup> One project in particular bands together the information systems of Armenia's institutes for seismological analysis with those of institutes in Greece, Italy and the UK.<sup>14</sup>

As with the South Caucasus, the Central Asian states are interested in upgrading security cooperation among themselves and forging closer ties with NATO and its members (i.e., Turkey and the US) to enhance regional security. The recent exercise of the Central Asian peacekeeping battalion, CENTRASBAT, a US-sponsored "in the spirit of" PfP exercise in Kazakhstan, for example, went a long way toward improving military skills and capabilities, as well as increasing military contacts. CENTRASBAT consists of national battalions from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. CENTRASBAT exercises, launched in 1996, enable the Central Asian states to cooperate more closely with NATO peacekeepers and, more importantly, with each other, by testing communications and coordination between national delegations and capitals, as well as crisis response mechanisms. According to US General Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, these peacekeeping exercises play an important role in bilateral relations and regional security.<sup>15</sup>

More than 2,000 troops from Kazakhstan, the United States, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Turkey, Britain and Russia participated in CENTRASBAT 2000.<sup>16</sup> This exercise was adapted to Central Asia, focusing on regional security to include reconnaissance, patrolling and security operations to help the Central Asian states improve border defense. The US has already provided Uzbekistan's border troops with all-terrain vehicles for patrolling and two-way radios and other equipment for use in the Pamir Mountains to help strengthen border security against recent guerrilla attacks.<sup>17</sup> The rugged Pamir mountains provide a secure base for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).<sup>18</sup>

The importance of regional security has been highlighted by Islamic insurgencies in the three Central Asian states. The IMU staged several incursions in August 2000 into a remote mountainous region bordering southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan from bases in Tajikistan. US Army General Thomas Franks, commander-in-chief of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), concludes "one of the reasons we believe it is so important to have the Central Asian battalion exercises is to be able to handle these internal regional problems such as the IMU." USCENTCOM has the US security responsibility for 25 nations, extending from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula and Central Asia. Central Asia's security problems are compounded by the close proximity of Afghanistan, which plays a significant role in the international drug trade (an estimated 65-80 percent of the drugs produced in Afghanistan are routed through Central Asia) and provides a safe haven for terrorist organizations such as the IMU.<sup>19</sup> In addition to maintaining a presence in Central Asia, the IMU operates from bases in



Afghanistan. General Franks also stated his “assessment of the IMU activity as it comes out of Afghanistan and Tajikistan is very troubling.”<sup>20</sup>

As well as hosting CENTRASBAT exercises, Kazakhstan’s 2000-2001 Individual Partnership Plan centers on defense planning and strategy in addition to military reform, including democratic control of the armed forces. According to the NATO secretary-general, defense reform is a major theme in the former Soviet states.

Defence reform is therefore indispensable. First and foremost, defence reform is about meeting your national defence and security needs, it is a national interest. Secondly, it is about strengthening your Partnership with the Alliance through PfP. And thirdly, it is about prospective membership and your ability to contribute to the security of the Alliance.<sup>21</sup>

Kazakhstan also places a high priority on joint environmental efforts. NATO, for example, is providing \$450,000 to Kazakhstan for cleanup efforts at the recently deactivated Semipalatinsk nuclear test site.<sup>22</sup> Kazakhstan’s southeastern neighbor, Kyrgyzstan, has focused primarily on disaster preparedness and PfP activities that improve its ability to fortify border security, including reconnaissance and training for its mountain units to defend against well-armed terrorist groups operating in remote terrain. US military experts, for example, instructed 150 Kyrgyz soldiers in anti-terrorism methods and mountain fighting techniques during February-March 2001 to help reinforce its mountainous southern borders.<sup>23</sup>

Like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan has also focused on border security. Tashkent is already expanding its security cooperation with Ankara by sending Uzbek counter-terrorism units to Turkey for training in mountainous areas and high elevations, places where guerrilla forces are known to operate.<sup>24</sup> Uzbekistan also attaches a high priority to peacekeeping. In May 2000, Uzbekistan participated in a German/US-sponsored, “in the spirit of” PfP exercise, Combined Endeavor, a command, control, and communications

exercise aimed at improving interoperability with NATO peacekeeping forces. Uzbekistan has indicated it could possibly volunteer up to two infantry platoons for peacekeeping duty beyond its borders.

Unlike other Central Asian states, Tajikistan is not a member of PfP, although in Dushanbe there is renewed interest in closer military cooperation with NATO and the West. Despite its neutrality, Turkmenistan is deeply interested in crisis management and peacekeeping, particularly medical capabilities. Turkmenistan has sent military observers and other officers to attend peacekeeping training and medical courses at the PfP training center in Turkey.

The Individual Partnership Plans of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, by far the most active participants in Central Asia, are geared toward PfP training and activities in command, control, communications and information systems, disaster planning, defense policy and strategy, democratic control of the armed forces, military exercises and English-language skills. Additionally, most of the Central Asian states attend NATO courses and seminars in crisis management and peacekeeping as well as various other exchange programs. Notwithstanding, full participation by the Central Asian states in PfP activities has been limited due to a lack of political resolve (perhaps due to Russian presence), financial resources, and English-language proficiency in addition to cumbersome bureaucratic red tape and poor internal coordination.<sup>25</sup>

Western assistance to the Central Asian states is not restricted to military training and exercises under NATO auspices. Additional support comes from institutions such as the Marshall Center, which supports the Central Asian states in their efforts to establish national security structures, foster regional cooperation and resolve security problems.

For example, the Kyrgyzstan International Institute for Strategic Studies and the George C. Marshall Center organized a seminar on civil-military relations in Bishkek from 29 January-1 February 2001 to discuss Kyrgyz security issues. Kyrgyz officials from the parliament, news media, and ministries of defense, interior and foreign affairs discussed the military and society, including parliament's role in formulating national security policy and exercising democratic control of military forces.

The seminar featured presentations by experts from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States on the role of legislatures and military institutions in democratic societies. All sides agreed on the need to establish a "broad-based dialogue" on Kyrgyzstan's armed forces and defense policy. The group also recommended enhancing parliamentary oversight of defense policy and the armed forces, in addition to involving the public in the military reform process, improving soldiers' quality of life and restoring prestige to military service.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, establishing an apolitical, professional military capable of responding to regional crisis, including humanitarian assistance, should be a priority for most if not all of the Central Asian states. The Marshall Center will also organize the Central Asia Regional Security Conference in Kazakhstan in June 2001. Last year's conference on "Promoting Stability in Central Asia" in Tashkent brought together officials from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in assessing the potential for regional conflict.<sup>27</sup>

From military training in Azerbaijan and Georgia to CENTRASBAT exercises in Kazakhstan, certain South Caucasus and Central Asian states are learning how to work together with NATO forces and use NATO procedures, particularly in the areas of crisis management and peacekeeping. NATO PfP has also succeeded in helping to bring the

South Caucasus and Central Asian militaries closer to NATO standards although to varying degrees. Through practical cooperation, NATO can enhance long-term regional security and stability in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. During a visit to the South Caucasus, the NATO secretary-general recently assessed Partnership for Peace efforts:

This program has provided added momentum to the reform process of many Partner nations, particularly concerning practical questions of how to organize and control military forces in democratic societies. And it has led to a degree of technical and conceptual interoperability among our forces that is unprecedented. In short, PfP has marked the beginning of a new security culture throughout Eurasia – a culture based on practical security cooperation.<sup>28</sup>

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ariel Cohen, "Ethnic Conflicts Threaten US Interests in the Caucasus," *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, 25 September 1998.
- <sup>2</sup> *Kommersant*, 6 July 00; via *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*.
- <sup>3</sup> *Financial Times*, 12 March 01.
- <sup>4</sup> Speech by NATO Secretary-General George Robertson, "Caucasus Today: Perspectives of Regional Cooperation and Partnership with NATO," Tbilisi, Georgia, 26 September 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> Associated Press, 5 April 01; via lexis-nexis.
- <sup>6</sup> *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 30 November 00; via BBC Summary of World Broadcasts.
- <sup>7</sup> NATO Release, 26 September 00.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Wall Street Journal*, 29-30 September 00.
- <sup>9</sup> Interfax, 23 February 01; via lexis-nexis.
- <sup>10</sup> Georgia Defense Assessment, 26 May 00.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Wall Street Journal*, 29-30 September 00.
- <sup>12</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, 12 March 01.
- <sup>13</sup> *Snark*, 1550 GMT, 15 August 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0816, via World News Connection.
- <sup>14</sup> Pol De Witte, "Fostering Stability and Security in the Southern Caucasus," *NATO Review*, Spring 1999.
- <sup>15</sup> ITAR-TASS, 1515 GMT, 13 September 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0913, via World News Connection.
- <sup>16</sup> Interfax, 13 September 00; via lexis-nexis.
- <sup>17</sup> *Kommersant*, 6 July 00; via *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*.
- <sup>18</sup> Ahmed Rashid, "Pamirs Offer IMU Secure Base," *Eurasia Insight*, 17 April 01.
- <sup>19</sup> Tamara Makarenko, "Central Asia Commits to Military Reform," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 23 August 00.
- <sup>20</sup> Agence France Presse, 13 September 00; via lexis-nexis.
- <sup>21</sup> Speech by NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson, "Promoting Peace through Partnership," Cambridge European Trust Lecture, London, UK, 12 October 00.

## Notes

<sup>22</sup> *Kommersant*, 6 July 00; via *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*.

<sup>23</sup> *Novoye Pokoleniye*, 2 March 01; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis.

<sup>24</sup> Interfax, 1515 GMT, 18 September 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0918, via World News Connection.

<sup>25</sup> E-mail correspondence with the Partnership Coordination Cell in Mons, Belgium.

<sup>26</sup> Marshall Center Conference Summary, 1 February 01.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall Center Press Release, 10 May 00.

<sup>28</sup> Speech by NATO Secretary-General George Robertson, "Caucasus Today: Perspectives of Regional Cooperation and Partnership with NATO," Tbilisi, Georgia, 26 September 2000.

## **Chapter 5**

### **FUTURE TRENDS**

Three definite trends have emerged during the last few years. First, NATO military engagement within the framework of PfP increasingly focuses on improving interoperability between partner nations and NATO forces. This is particularly important since the alliance will play an extended role in future multinational peace support operations such as the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. As discussed, Azerbaijan and Georgia already have infantry platoons meshed with Turkey's peacekeeping battalion in Kosovo. Clearly, crisis management and peacekeeping have become staples of NATO's mission in addition to collective security. Integrating partner nations into NATO-led peace support operations is a political and military necessity that remains critical to efforts to enhance security and stability on Europe's periphery.<sup>1</sup> As NATO Secretary-General George Robertson explained,

A major part of the co-operative effort under PfP is to prepare Partner countries to be able to deploy forces alongside Allied ones in possible crisis management, peacekeeping, and humanitarian operations. In this way, we would expand the pool of trained peacekeeping forces able to work closely together in the field. And there can be no doubt that we have come a long way in achieving this aim. Today, PfP has become a flagship of military cooperation, a cooperation that ranges from North America to Central Asia.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, peacekeeping exercises such as Cooperative Determination and Cooperative Partner in Azerbaijan and Georgia, respectively, underscore the importance of PfP in

creating interoperable forces and qualified staff personnel that can be employed in peace support operations at all levels. In Central Asia, CENTRASBAT exercises continually have improved the ability of peacekeeping battalions from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to work together more smoothly with NATO forces. Uzbekistan indicated it may be willing to provide up to two platoons for NATO-led peace support operations. Additionally, responding to crisis situations has taken on a more multinational composition and undoubtedly increased the importance and complexity of command, control and communications systems. Accordingly, PfP will continue to focus on improving interoperability and connectivity among NATO and partner nations, thus highlighting the need for exercises such as Combined Endeavor. Combined Endeavor brings together 35 nations for command, control, communications, computers and information (C4I) interoperability testing and documentation. The Director for Command, Control, and Communications Systems of the United States European Command, Brig. Gen. Charles E. Croom (USAF), said “This is a wonderful opportunity to not only test the interoperable capabilities of our systems, but to also interact on a human level with our multinational C4 community. It gives us a chance to learn about each other’s countries and to add a personal experience to our mission.”<sup>3</sup>

Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan were actively involved in Combined Endeavor in May 2000 and currently are planning to participate again in 2001. Indeed, command and control exercises in particular are high on the South Caucasus and Central Asian states’ security agendas as a primary means to achieve interoperability with NATO forces. Finland’s defense minister, Mrs. Anneli Taina, recently told a conference of EAPC defense ministers that “as far as interoperability goes, it seems that we should

continue to focus on the development of common doctrine and procedures, particularly in the areas of command and control, logistics, language and communications skill.”<sup>4</sup> PfP is a suitable framework for making command, control, communications and information systems interoperable, particularly for crisis management and peacekeeping.

Second, PfP is becoming increasingly tailored toward the individual partner nations and regions as a whole as reflected in Individual Partnership Plans and regional exercises. Accordingly, partner nations now have a more active role in determining the size and scope of their participation in the program. On 23 March 2001, Robertson told a conference on Promoting Peace through Partnerships that

Clearly, Partnership is not static. It is a dynamic process of moving closer to one another politically and militarily. All of our currently twenty-seven Partners understand that they are the ones who decide how far and how deep co-operation can and should go. And the Allies realise that it is up to them to respond to the commitment shown by the Partners, to recognise the momentum generated by our common engagement in Kosovo, and to make a qualitative step forward in NATO’s partnership relations.<sup>5</sup>

In the South Caucasus, for example, Azerbaijan and Georgia have received extensive NATO assistance in reorganizing and reforming their militaries. Additionally, training in detecting and destroying mines, which involved all three South Caucasus states, has provided much-needed de-mining capability and has aided in establishing a basis for future regional cooperation. Georgia and Turkey signed a defense cooperation agreement in January 2001 for the removal of land mines along their common border. In Central Asia, PfP was recently adapted to a fast-paced, rapidly changing security situation by inserting border security methods into CENTRASBAT exercises in Kazakhstan in response to IMU incursions into three neighboring Central Asian states. Additionally, both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are receiving mountain training in order to improve efforts in the region to fight international terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime and



proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Active participation in PfP remains essential to joining NATO, as it provides a “well-established way” of transforming the military and defense establishment based on Western models and developing interoperability with NATO forces.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the South Caucasus and Central Asian states are interested in expanding cooperation with NATO. In 1999, Georgia joined the Planning and Review Process (PARP), a special program of cooperation in defense planning within PfP for NATO and partner countries in order to prepare partner nation militaries for combined operations. Azerbaijan is also a member of PARP. Azerbaijan has also expressed strong interest in developing a Membership Action Plan (MAP) in preparation for the possibility (albeit remote) of applying for NATO membership. The MAP provides a feedback mechanism for countries aspiring to join the alliance. PfP itself, however, still remains essential for improving interoperability with NATO forces in addition to developing the force structure and military capabilities necessary for hypothetical NATO membership.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which are contiguous and border NATO member Turkey, may be considered serious candidates for NATO accession at some stage since they play a pivotal role in NATO and US efforts to enhance regional security on Europe’s periphery and ensure access to Caspian energy resources. Armenia also wants to expand cooperation with NATO and has recently requested NATO assistance in developing a UN peacekeeping battalion. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan, which still clings to Soviet-era military structures, has indicated it may also want to join PARP. Kazakhstan is also interested in developing a UN peacekeeping battalion with NATO support. The five Central Asian states could all benefit from NATO assistance in restructuring their

militaries to counter international terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal arms trading, organized crime and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Disaster preparedness is another area for expanding cooperation within NATO PfP. Due to their geographic location, the South Caucasus and Central Asia are prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. Consequently, many of the South Caucasus and Central Asian states are keen to increase cooperation with NATO in the area of disaster planning. In so doing, there is room for expanding opportunities to foster practical regional cooperation in the South Caucasus and Central Asia by applying experience from other regions. In late September 2000, for example, NATO and Ukraine conducted a disaster relief exercise in the Trans-Carpathian region of Western Ukraine to test Euro-Atlantic disaster response capability. The exercise used a flood scenario and consisted of two parts: a command post exercise followed by a field training exercise. The first phase tested the procedures used by the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC) at NATO Headquarters and national disaster response coordination centers in response to a request for international assistance from Ukraine. The second phase focused on the activities of disaster response teams from 11 countries operating as part of the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Unit (EADRU), marking the first time the unit was exercised as a whole. Other activities included search and rescue, provisions for life support and medical care, water purification and cleaning of contaminated rivers.<sup>8</sup>

The exercise actually built on the experience gained by Ukraine and the EADRCC in dealing with major flooding in the Trans-Carpathian region in 1998. A disaster relief exercise program should be developed for the South Caucasus and Central Asia using a

similar template and based on lessons learned from earthquakes in Armenia and eastern Turkey, respectively, in 1988 and 1999, as well as other natural disasters in the Central Asian states more recently. This would improve disaster response capability and, more importantly, might promote systematic regional cooperation between the neighboring states as well as other regional powers such as Russia and Turkey.

Ultimately, the trend towards increasing interoperability in the fields of crisis management and peacekeeping will make PfP more useful in supporting NATO out-of-area operations in the future. Additionally, tailoring PfP to the security requirements of the partner nations themselves and the regions overall as well as expanding military engagement with the South Caucasus and Central Asian states will enhance regional stability and long-term European security.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Speech by Mrs. Anneli Taina, Minister of Defense of Finland, "Future NATO-led Support Operations and the Development of the PARP Process," Brussels, 12 June 98.

<sup>2</sup> NATO Release, 12 Oct 00.

<sup>3</sup> Combined Endeavor Overview.

<sup>4</sup> Speech by Mrs. Anneli Taina, Minister of Defense of Finland, "Future NATO-led Support Operations and the Development of the PARP Process," Brussels, 12 June 98.

<sup>5</sup> NATO Speech, "Promoting Peace through Partnership," 23 March 01.

<sup>6</sup> *NATO Review*, Summer 1999.

<sup>7</sup> NATO Fact Sheet, April 00.

<sup>8</sup> NATO Release, Exercise Trans-Carpathia 2000, September 00.

## **Chapter 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in momentous geopolitical changes worldwide. In the past decade, the Newly Independent States (NIS) have been finding their identity with little overall strategy or guidance from outside – leading to a level of instability that could have global effects. Given Russia's adverse reaction to Western-led initiatives to expand alliances and help the NIS move toward democracy, such assistance has to be provided gradually, taking into account – but not being limited by – Russian reaction. The PfP program is a valuable tool for bringing the NIS out of Russia's umbrella and into the world community.

The geographic location and access to Caspian energy resources have been major factors in determining the strategic importance of the South Caucasus and Central Asia to European security. Unquestionably, Partnership for Peace has enabled NATO to expand its military influence as well as foster regional security and stability in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Additionally, the increased size and scope of PfP has undoubtedly increased interoperability with NATO forces and partially advanced the reform processes of many of these states, particularly concerning questions of how to organize and control military forces in democratic societies.

Overall, the continuing trends of NATO military engagement within the framework of PfP should enable the South Caucasus and Central Asia to make steady progress toward increased interoperability with NATO forces and enhanced regional security and stability. Additionally, NATO PfP has outlined a coherent strategy for engagement based on Individual Partnership Plans, the Planning and Review Process, and Membership Action Plans to improve the performance and capabilities of future coalition partners and general stability in the region.

It remains to be seen, though, exactly how NATO will deal with the very real hurdles to regional security created by secessionist movements and the stationing of Russian “peacekeepers” in Georgia, the potential for a widening war in the Caucasus and non-traditional security threats in Central Asia. In response, NATO should continue to support Georgia’s efforts to resolve separatist conflicts, to bring about withdrawal of Russian military bases, troops and equipment, as well as to increase border security, disaster preparedness and military reform in the South Caucasus and Central Asian states.

A RAND study, “NATO and Caspian Security: A Mission Too Far,” recently concluded that NATO should only play an advisory role in the Caspian region.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding, NATO will remain engaged in troubled regions throughout Central Eurasia. The realization of some or most of NATO’s objectives could result in a more stable South Caucasus and Central Asia.

The NATO alliance acknowledges the strategic importance of regional security and stability in the South Caucasus and Central Asia to long-term European security. NATO PfP will remain an essential framework for military engagement, and for the preparation of forces for coalition operations in crisis management and peacekeeping. PfP has

developed into a “core activity” for NATO and an indispensable foundation for a stable security environment on Europe’s periphery. At a recent lecture in Berlin on “NATO in the New Millennium,” Secretary-General George Robertson said:

Today, Partnership has become a fundamental security task of NATO - with PfP and EAPC having acquired a major strategic value of their own. Today, a NATO without Partnerships has simply become unthinkable. That is why we will continue to make these partnerships ever more operational and valuable -- as investments in the future of this continent.<sup>2</sup>

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The RAND Corporation, Project Air Force, *1999 Annual Report*.

<sup>2</sup> NATO Speech, Berlin, Germany, 25 January 01.